

*A Bi-Monthly Publication of your Arizona Local Masters Swim Committee*

## Arizona Masters Honors Judy Gillies with 2006 Gruender Award

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**Now You Can Reach  
Arizona Masters  
24/7 by dialing  
480-365-0037**



Congratulations to Judy Gillies, recipient of the Edie and Dan Gruender Award for 2006. The award, named for Arizona Masters founders and life-long supporters Edie and Dan Gruender, is given to the one individual (or couple) that has given the most to the Arizona LMSC (Local Masters Swim Committee) within the last year.

Judy, who swims with Ford Aquatic Masters in Tucson, has been an active member of USMS and Arizona Masters for (way) more than 20 years. She has served on and off the board as Officials Chair and Chairperson, among other roles, having missed but a few meetings ever.

***2005 award recipient Jim Stites passes forward the plaque to Judy Gillies***

In addition to her leadership contributions, Judy officiates (and competes) at every Arizona Masters meet and numerous out of state meets as well. She has attended the USMS convention as a representative of our state for many consecutive years. Now that she has retired from teaching, we look forward to Judy having even more time to devote to Arizona Masters!

Eligibility for this award is open to swimmers, volunteers, officials, sponsors--anyone who has given a great deal of time or effort to promote, sustain and improve Arizona Masters for the benefit of its membership and the life-long sport of swimming.

Past recipients have included:

2003 - Edie & Dan Gruender (in honor of Edie & Dan's 30 years of service.)  
2004 - Mark Gill  
2005 - Jim Stites  
2006 - Judy Gillies

Nominations for this award are accepted every Fall for voting and presentation at the last meet of the year. All members are welcome and encouraged to make nominations, formally or informally, to any member of the board or by calling the Arizona Masters hotline at 480-365-0037. You will find current board members listed on the next page. (See ballot enclosed for slate of incoming board, and be sure to cast your vote!)

## Happy New Year 2007 the Year of the USMS Volunteer!



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As you're setting goals for 2007, why not make one of them to help out Arizona Masters the next time they need a volunteer? Dana Hunter recently volunteered to help our registrar stuff 420 envelopes, and he was very grateful.

Vice Chair Doug Adamavich says one of our big pushes for 2007 will be to increase the number of teams throughout the state. We will need to mail letters and other materials to the various YMCAs, fitness clubs, military bases, parks and recreation departments, and other pool owners. If we can get some help putting the mailings together, that would be great!

As chair of the subcommittee of members services, Mitch Mitchell has offered to be the contact person for anyone interested in volunteering. Contact R. A. Mitchell via email: [rammedd@hotmail.com](mailto:rammedd@hotmail.com), or call the Arizona Masters Hotline to put your name in the volunteer pool. Arizona Masters thanks you.

## Register and Vote Today!

If you have not yet registered with USMS for 2007, please do so today using the form enclosed. In addition, you will find a ballot enclosed for 2007-08 board positions. Kindly complete and return both forms promptly in the envelope provided, to Registrar R.A. Mitchell.

## Fish-Out-a-Wata Socials

Have you ever wondered what the person next to you really looks like without a cap on? Wonder what do they do when they're not passing you? Want to meet swimmers from other teams? Your Arizona Masters swim committee has organized two upcoming socials for swimmers to socialize out of the water. Just imagine having a complete conversation fully clothed without panting between sets! Feel free to bring along a spouse or a friend who's curious about Masters. The first event will be held in Tucson at the Kingfisher Bar and Grill on Saturday, February 3 from 4-6. This is the day before the Polar Bear meet, so hopefully our friends statewide will be able to make it. The next event will take place in Tempe February 20 from 6:30 to 8:30 at the Four Peaks Brewery. This is a Tuesday evening. (Flyers for both events are enclosed). Please spread the word about these two events and make an effort to attend one or both if you possibly can. Appetizers provided courtesy of Arizona Masters.

## Open Water First

By June C. Hussey

Everyone remembers their first open water race. Like a first kiss, it takes a lot of nerve—or at least a little. And it either goes well, or it doesn't. Either way, you never forget it. You're hooked on the experience and you want to go back for more. That's just how it is with open water swimming.

Every swimmer has a story about how they got hooked. This is a story about Karen Oden, a Tucson athlete who completed her first open water event last summer at the age of 47. She could have respectably selected the one-mile course at the 76th annual La Jolla Rough Water Swim. Instead, she signed up to swim three miles in the Gatorman, an event that requires completion within 1 hour 45 minutes. A brave first by anyone's standards.

On September 10, 2006, Karen stood on the beach in La Jolla Cove, elbow to elbow and ankle deep with hundreds of others about to swim the round trip to Scripps Pier and back. Only then did it occur to the Tucson mother of two to ask one of the veteran swimmers about race strategy.

"Just aim for that big pier over there," came the non-technical response.

The environmental engineer gazed to the distant pier, barely visible in the misty glare. The next thing she knew, Karen was in the center of the frothy, narrow start. Rocks to the left and cliffs to the right make for an interesting and somewhat intimidating introduction to the sport.

She was calm as a sea cucumber.

"I've always felt comfortable in the ocean," admits Karen. "That part was not a hurdle for me." Apparently, crowds don't faze her either.

As a child, her parents used to take her to the Jersey shore in the summertime, and like any fearless kid at the beach on a hot day, Karen learned to understand, respect and love the power and movement of the ocean. 25 years of SCUBA diving has only bolstered her comfort level with the sea and its creatures.

Karen was also confident in her ability to do the distance. She was at the peak of fitness. She had trained for and completed her first half Ironman a few weeks earlier. Barb's Race in Santa Rosa, California included a 1.25-mile swim in the Russian River, 56 miles on a bike through wine country, and a 13.1 mile run. She wore a wet suit for that swim and found it easy enough, with scenery so distracting she nearly forgot she was in a race.

There are no wet suits allowed at La Jolla, but the temperature this year, at 70 degrees, would not be inhibiting. Looking out over the course now, Karen noticed it was not well marked like the Russian River course had been, lined with buoys. In fact, she was surprised by how wide open it looked.

Karen laughs now at her naivety then. "I remember asking someone next to me in the queue if there were paddlers out on the course that would offer me water." Having trained long and hard in the desert heat, proper hydration was foremost on her mind. She quickly learned that the paddlers were few and far between and their sole job is to make sure you don't swim off course. Hydrated or not, she'd be glad they were there.

A life-long athlete, Karen didn't grow up a swimmer. She was a competitive gymnast in Illinois from age 5 to 17, specializing in the uneven bars. After college, she joined Masters in 1985, swimming for a time with Swimfit, a team started by former UA Coach Bob Davis (which later became Ford Aquatics Masters). When grad school and kids came along, Karen traded in coached workouts for lap swimming and played tennis whenever she could.

Six years ago, her oldest son, Alex, was diagnosed with cancer at age 12. Karen's whole being shifted to focus on him. His health—indeed his very survival—was all consuming.

**ATTN: OPEN WATER SWIMMERS!!**  
Looking for relay swimmers for the Maui Channel Swim

The Maui Channel is a 10-mile stretch between two Hawaiian Islands, Lanai and Maui. Every Saturday before Labor Day they hold a swim between these two islands. In 2007, the swim will be on September 1st. One can do the swim individually, but most do it as a relay.

The relay consists of 6 swimmers: mixed gender, all female or all male. Each swimmer swims in rotation for 30 minutes, then they continue the rotation for 10 minute legs until you reach the beach on Maui. There is a big banquet at the Kaanapali Beach Resort the evening after the race. The fee per participant is \$105, plus escort boat to navigate for us, at a cost of around \$100 per person. I (Judy Gillies) am seriously looking for 5 other women who may be interested in doing this race. I have heard from a few already. If you're interested, contact: Judy Gillies by email [jgillies@mindspring.com](mailto:jgillies@mindspring.com) or phone at: 520-622-4129. We need to get on this right away.

For more info, visit: [mauichannelswim.com](http://mauichannelswim.com)





**“I like pushing myself and trying new things,” says Karen. “It’s not about winning for me.”**

Together, Karen and Alex decided to compete in the Tinfoilman Sprint Triathlon, both as a way to build strength as well as a way to raise money for Tee Up for Tots, a fund that helps kids who are fighting cancer. Karen didn’t have a bike and could not even run a lap around the track at the time. But if Alex could do it, she knew she could do it, so they did it together.

A year after undergoing chemo and radiation therapy for germinoma, the cancer affecting the pituitary gland in his brain, Alex experienced a relapse. But he would not be beat. This time, during aggressive stem cell treatment, he set up a training bike in his hospital room. Like his hero, Lance Armstrong, he worked through his pain. Three months after his treatment was complete, Alex ran the Lute and Bobbi Olson Half Marathon. He not only conquered his cancer, his athletic fundraising efforts raised \$50,000 to help other kids in their fight. Today, at 18, he remains cancer free and a real role model for kids battling cancer, not to mention for his mom.

Witnessing a child’s determination to beat a life-threatening disease gives you strength. You know about will power. You know you have to do the best you can with what you have. You know you have to have faith and a positive attitude. Athletic feats mesh well with such an outlook on life.

“I like pushing myself and trying new things,” says Karen. “It’s not about winning for me. I’ll never walk away with a first. I want to finish and do well, and I want to do better next time.”

Karen, who has finished several century rides in El Tour de Tucson, re-dedicated herself to

Masters swimming in the summer of 2005, swimming with Coach Mike Lorimer at the Tucson JCC.

She added personal training and running to her schedule, watched her nutrition, and set her sites on Barb’s Race, an all-women’s cancer fundraiser held in conjunction with Vine Man in Santa Rosa. While training for Barb’s race, whenever she heard other swimmers talking about swimming La Jolla, her ears perked up. She thought it sounded fun. Now, here she was, swimming it.

“The crowded start didn’t really bother me. I was with the same group the whole way to the pier,” she remembers. “Then after the turn buoy, they disappeared and I was on my own. I didn’t know where they went and I didn’t know where I was going, but I kept swimming. I never stopped,” she recalls.

Nobody had told Karen what to sight for on the way back. She hadn’t heard the announcer mention the strobe light fixed to the lifeguard station marking the finish, not that it’s easy to see anyway. Not to worry, she could see the coastline ahead and to her left, and an occasional paddler on her right, and she made it back to the cove just fine, one hour and 37 minutes after her feet pushed off the sand.

She made it! Karen’s time might not have been the best time out there, but she had a good time and that’s all that matters to her. “Growing up a gymnast, competing was never about time for me, it was about performance, about doing your best,” she explains. “I think if you get hung up on time, it prevents you from doing things you would otherwise really enjoy.”

Her husband, Randy, was there to greet her with a towel. She got her finisher’s medal. Later, on the plane back to Tucson, she looked around at all the other swimmers heading home, that peaceful sense of exhaustion about them, and thought to herself, I’m glad to be among them.

Karen’s next goal is to run the San Diego Rock and Roll marathon next June, her first 26-mile road race. La Jolla Rough Water again? You bet, she’ll be back. Just another swimmer hooked on open water.

And an inspiring one at that.



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